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ABSTRACT

This program advisory provides direction to school districts and providers of preschool and early primary programs in California who are implementing the recommendations of the School Readiness Task Force Report, "Here They Come: Ready or Not!" The Task Force Report addressed the issue of what kind of education would be necessary during the early years of a child's life if the child were to be prepared for the 21st century. It was concluded that California should increase support for the education of 4-year-olds and change the nature of kindergarten and first grade programs so that the programs fit the children in them. This advisory gives attention to Task Force recommendations about curriculum and instruction, assessment, parent involvement, and staff development. Sections focus on: (1) defining the educational program; (2) building partnerships with parents and among schools and programs; and (3) implementing the recommendations. In the last section, procedural suggestions and ideas are offered. Appendices provide acknowledgements, a reading list of 20 citations, and a list of related publications available from California's State Department of Education. (RH)

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FSB: 88/9-10

PROGRAM ADVISORY

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DATE: June 12, 1989

PROGRAM: Child Development Division

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TO: County and District Superintendents
Directors of Curriculum and Instruction
Directors of Preschool and Child Development Programs
Elementary School Principals
Primary and Preschool Teachers

FROM: Bill Honig, Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig

SUBJECT: Educating Young Children: Next Steps in Implementing the School Readiness Task Force Report

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this advisory is to provide direction to school districts and the providers of preschool and early primary programs (kindergarten through third grade) as they are implementing the recommendations of the School Readiness Task Force Report: Here They Come: Ready or Not! This report was distributed to school districts and child development programs in the spring of 1988.

This advisory seeks to:

- Urge districts and child development programs to make a firm commitment to the quality and the continuity of the educational experiences of their young children, particularly those ages four through six.
- Assist districts and child development programs as they implement recommendations from Here They Come: Ready or Not!

The Task Force Report addressed the question "What kind of education is necessary during the crucial early years of a child's life--from ages four through six--to prepare them for the twenty-first century?" The members of the Task Force, comprised of experts including practitioners, were appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1987. They held four public hearings, interviewed 25 expert witnesses, and reviewed the current research on child development and educational policy.

Their conclusion was that California should increase support for the education of four-year-olds and change the nature of kindergarten and first grade programs so that they fit the child rather than trying to fit the child into inappropriate programs.

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The twelve recommendations from Here They Come: Ready or Not! follow:

1. An appropriate, integrated, experiential curriculum should be provided for children ages four through six.
2. Class size should be reduced.
3. Programs should meet the special needs of our culturally and linguistically diverse students, as well as the needs of exceptional students.
4. Classroom organization and teaching methods should reflect the heterogeneous skills and abilities of the children in the early primary program.
5. The staff of the early primary programs should receive appropriate education, training, and remuneration.
6. Full-day programs should be an option for children ages four through six.
7. Programs should provide either before- or after-school child care or links with child development programs for children who need this care.
8. Assessment methods for children in early primary programs should be drastically altered.
9. Funding and support must be made available for the early primary programs.
10. Facilities should be rebuilt or remodeled to meet the needs of early primary programs.
11. Parental involvement should be encouraged.
12. A public awareness campaign should be launched describing appropriate learning practices for children ages four through six.

This program advisory focuses on the Task Force Report recommendations about curriculum and instruction, assessment, parent involvement, and staff development. These recommendations were selected because they can be readily addressed and implemented. Please feel free to duplicate this advisory as needed. For further information contact Robert Cervantes, Director, Child Development Division, at (916) 322-6233.

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Part I. Defining the Educational Program

Creating the Vision

Young children love learning. They don't have to be taught to learn--they are learners. Young children enter school with excitement and joy, bringing their love of learning with them. For some children, school fulfills their anticipation of a wonderful place to be and to learn. For others, the excitement and joy fade away and the love of learning is diminished through inappropriate educational experiences which signal to the children that they are less than capable learners. The vision of educational programs for young children should begin with a clear and shared understanding by both school staff and parents of the nature of young children and how they learn. With this understanding, the curricular and instructional program can be designed so that it is appropriate to the whole child, reflecting the students' level of development, age, and uniqueness and cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity.

> Young children do not learn in the same way as older children and adults. Because the world of things, people, and language is so new to infants and young children, they learn best through direct encounters with their world rather than through formal education involving the inculcation of symbolic rules.
>
> Given the well-established fact that young children learn differently, the conclusion that educators must draw is a straightforward one: the education of young children must be in keeping with their unique modes of learning.[1]

This educational vision also should take into account the changes in California's population. California's families and their children have changed rapidly over the past two decades and continue to do so. The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of California's population is a great strength of the state, providing an enriched and enriching environment to the people of the state. At the same time, this diversity poses a challenge to our institutions, especially the schools, many of which are not fully prepared to embrace such diversity.

The number of children in California continues to increase (7.3 million in 1988, projected to increase 32 percent by 2000) and they are more linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse. One quarter of California's school children speak a language other than English; California receives 27 percent of the nation's immigrant children. The number of children in California living in poverty is increasing and is now above the national average. Among children living with single mothers, the incidence of poverty is 66 percent; among infants under three, it is 78 percent. Finally, the numbers of working mothers

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[1]Elkind, David. "Formal Education and Early Childhood Education: An Essential Difference." Phi Delta Kappan, May 1986, p. 631.

continue to increase. Currently, 54 percent of California's children in two-parent families have both parents working, and that figure is projected to increase to 60 percent by the year 2000. Approximately 23 percent of the children in the state live in single parent households.[2]

The changing faces of the referrals to special education are also a reflection of the changes occurring in society. The children reflect the results of substance abuse, AIDS, child neglect/abuse, teenage pregnancies, more children living in poverty, breakdown of the traditional family structure and support systems, and other critical health and social conditions resulting in an increasing number of infants and preschools requiring early intervention services.

Each of these conditions has a direct impact on the schooling of young children and must be considered in the definition of an optimal educational program. More children mean a need for more schools, teachers, and instructional materials. Increasing cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity means designing programs that not only build upon this diversity but use it to enrich the education of all children. Growing numbers of working parents along with the increase of children in poverty establish the need for more preschool and child care programs of quality and affordability.

Studies indicate that the preschool experience can be of substantial value for children, especially economically disadvantaged children. Several studies document the short term benefits for preschool children as they move into kindergarten and first grade. Other long-term studies indicate that certain types of preschool experiences can begin to break the terrible cycle of poverty that has afflicted many families. These studies found the children better prepared for school intellectually and socially, and less likely to be retained or to be placed in special education classes. They also found that as the children grew into adolescence and young adulthood, there were fewer instances of delinquency, teenage pregnancies, and welfare recipients, as more were employed.[3]

These studies illustrate clearly the cost effectiveness of early education. Depending upon the type of program children attended and the length of time in attendance, the cost-benefit ratio varied from 1:3 to 1:7. On average it could be stated that every dollar spent on preschool education for children "at risk" saved five dollars of remediation and social services later.

Given these changing conditions and the benefits of early education, the need for continuing reexamination of the educational system and the extent to which it meets the needs of our children and their families is imperative.

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[2]The Conditions of Children in California. Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), University of California, Berkeley, 1989.

[3]Lawrence J. Schweinhart and David P. Weikart. "Early Childhood Development Programs: A Public Investment Opportunity." Educational Leadership, November 1986, pp. 4-7.

In order for districts to create their own vision of what kind of educational program they want for young children, they need to assess their current programs, determine what the programs should look like, and then take steps to implement any changes. The first step is a districtwide review to assess the current program. The assessment will determine:

- Preschool programs available and which children are attending.
- Availability of child care programs and the process for identifying children who receive services.
- Communication between preschool programs and public and private kindergarten programs.
- Procedures and activities to facilitate successful transitions between and among programs.
- Whether or not barriers to entry exist.
- Articulation between the kindergarten and first grade programs within the public schools.

Similarly, the curriculum offered by the various programs for each age group and the extent of alignment among and between programs would be established. From the question "What curricular and instructional activities should children be experiencing as they progress through preschool, kindergarten, and first grade?" can come the answer that will help shape the curricular and instructional goals for the redesigned programs.

Finally, those creating this vision should review how:

- The vision of an articulated, aligned, and developmentally appropriate program is shared by the teachers, the administrators, and the policy-makers within the district.
- Each teacher is afforded ongoing, in-service training opportunities to deliver the kind of program envisioned.
- Parents of young children are included as partners in the education of their children.

Curriculum and Instruction

A central part of the vision is the first recommendation of the School Readiness Task Force: "An appropriate, integrated, experiential educational program should be provided for children ages four through six." The literature on the education of young children speaks to the need for "developmentally appropriate" curriculum and instruction. What are the characteristics of such a program?

First, developmentally appropriate programs are characterized by materials and activities that acknowledge children as active learners who:

- Learn by doing and talking about their experiences; by being engaged in hands-on activities.
- Learn through the interaction of their own thinking and experiences with their environment.
- Learn about their physical and social environments through direct interaction with objects and people.

Second, developmentally appropriate programs recognize that maturation is an important contributor to learning. Each child's growth and development provides a framework in which his or her learning proceeds; and as children grow and develop, they acquire new skills and experiences that facilitate learning.

Third, developmentally appropriate programs are both age-appropriate and individual-appropriate; that is, they are designed for the age group being served and with consideration of the specific needs and differences of the children.

Finally, the curriculum and the learning materials and activities the children experience are relevant to their lives. There is a connectedness between the curriculum and the cultural richness and language of the children, including their parents and their home life, that enables each child to make sense out of his or her own world. The cultures and languages the children bring to school and the curriculum, instructional activities, and the environment of the school program not only interact to facilitate children's learning, they enrich the program for all children by increasing the emergent cultural literacy of each child. This is especially important for limited-English-proficient students who take from five to seven years to become fully English-proficient.

The curriculum for young children is integrated as well as developmentally appropriate. That is, the curriculum design recognizes that children do not learn in narrowly defined subject areas; and while the appropriate skills and knowledge of mathematics, social studies, language, health, physical education, science, the arts, as well as social skill development are addressed, they are presented as integrated learning activities. The emphasis in all curricular areas is on the major understandings as appropriate to the children rather than on narrow skills. For example, a major understanding in mathematics is patterns.

> Looking for patterns helps bring order, cohesion, and predictability to seemingly unorganized situations. The recognition of patterns and functional relationships is a powerful problem-solving tool that enables one to simplify otherwise unmanageable tasks and to make generalizations beyond the information directly available.
>
> Identifying a rule that could have been used to generate a pattern enables one to extend that pattern indefinitely.[4]

Young children can begin to identify patterns in a number of ways including:

- Rhythms such as clap clap, stamp, blow; clap clap, stamp, blow; clap clap, stamp, blow; etc.
- Finding patterns in wallpaper, tiles, and clothing.
- Starting patterns with symbols and extending them.

  X X O X X O X X O

- Finding patterns in rhymes such as "Pease Porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot nine days old." (Mother Goose)

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[4] Mathematics Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1987, p. 35.

Whenever possible, oral language development in the child's own language should be a major focus of the program and a major avenue for the integration of curricular activities. The language curriculum should be designed to help each child develop an ability to use language for complex communication, and the program should be rich with activities to develop cultural and emergent literacy rather than reading readiness activities that focus on the acquisition of small skills and subskills. For example, children extend their language abilities and emergent literacy by listening to stories and poems, making up their own stories, participating in dramatic play, and experimenting with writing rather than practicing letter naming and letter-sound matching on work sheets.

The Handbook for Planning an Effective Literature Program states that:

> In the primary grades, children encounter literature mainly as it is told, read, or performed for them. This is an ideal time to engage in the time-honored tradition of storytelling. Teachers who tell stories will earn a special place in the hearts of their children; and this early exposure to oral literature will increase the children's attention span, listening vocabulary, the ability to visualize, and general cultural knowledge--all important prereading skills.[5]

Prior to the age of logical thought, children learn intuitively; that is, they understand their reality without the use of reason or inference. This way of learning works well with the symbols, images, and metaphors of the many stories and poems in children's literature. The use of literature and multiethnic, culturally rich stories, rhymes, and songs are, therefore, an essential feature for the language and thought development of the young child. Further, these children are highly receptive to the aesthetic experiences of all the visual and performing arts. A full and rich hands-on experience in the arts, science, and mathematics are the best preparation of the young mind for the logical/analytical cognitive stage to come next.

The Model Curriculum Guide for Science, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight, states that a major understanding for earth science under geology and natural resources is that "air is all around us; wind is moving air whose direction and speed can be measured."

The descriptive activity for this major understanding for kindergarten and first grade follows:

> The teacher will define air as a substance we cannot see, but which is all around us. Students will become aware of air by: (1) blowing up a balloon and feeling the air come out; (2) using a fan to move air; and (3) placing a bottle underwater and seeing bubbles come out. Students will determine wind direction by relating it to the position of various school buildings, trees, and the flag's direction.[6]

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[5]Handbook for Planning an Effective Literature Program. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1987, p. 19.

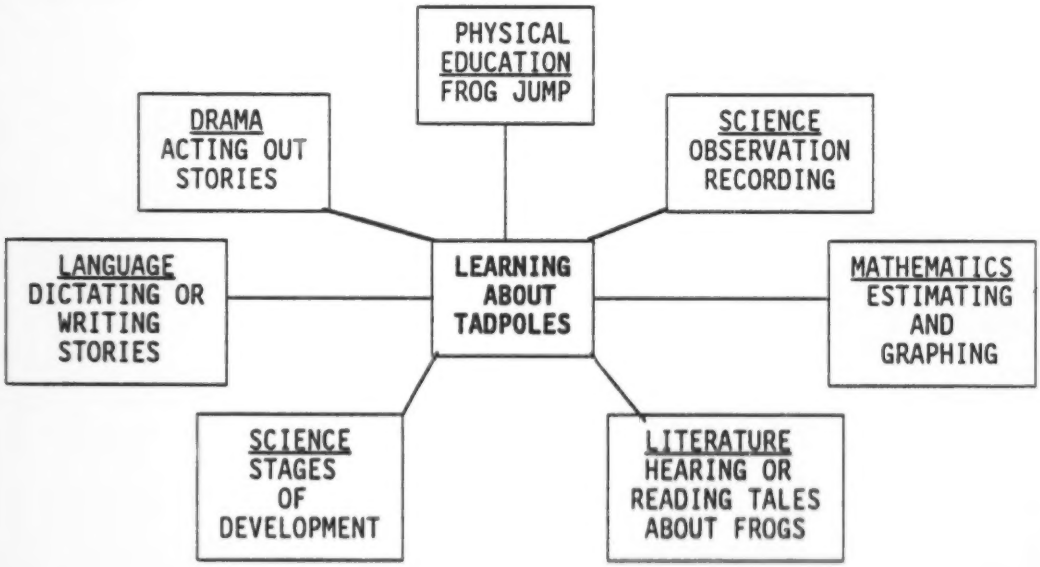
[6]Model Curriculum Guide for Science, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight. Sacramento: State Department of Education, 1987, p. 20.

The students can extend this activity by constructing simple wind socks or kites and flying them.

Curriculum and instruction are experiential, based on the experiences and the cultures of the children. The children are actively engaged in concrete learning activities appropriate to their ages and individual needs. Instruction also reflects the fact that children learn from each other. Working together in small groups and peer tutoring activities are basic approaches not only for learning the curriculum, but also for the development of social skills. Both homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings are used as needed. Teachers and support staff act as mediators and facilitators for young children as they learn, sometimes through direct instruction and sometimes through their organization of the environment to provide learning opportunities through experience.

In a developmentally appropriate program, there is a place for all children, including children with special needs, such as children "at risk," children whose home language is not English, children with potential or actual handicapping conditions, and exceptionally able children. A program that is age- and individual-appropriate not only accommodates the special needs and abilities of each child, it also stimulates each child to learn to the best of his or her ability. Therefore, isolating children with special needs in segregated classrooms or pulling them out of the regular classroom for special services rarely is necessary.

An example of an integrated unit follows. Activities within the unit should provide for a range of abilities that are both age and individually appropriate to the children. The activities should build on the children's natural interest in the world.



A unit on tadpoles could be presented in the spring. To catch the children's interest in tadpoles, the teacher can plan a visit to a nearby pond or river to see the tadpoles in their natural environment. An alternative is to bring tadpoles into the classroom. As the children observe the tadpoles they will become naturally curious about them. Once the class has their own tadpoles in

an aquarium in the classroom, the unit can begin. The first activity might be to learn more about tadpoles using picture books, well-illustrated science books, videos, and class discussion as a way to get information. The children can estimate how long they think it will take their tadpoles to become frogs and the teacher can graph their estimates. The teacher can provide, for a library area, storybooks about frogs and can read several of them aloud to the children. The school or local public librarian can help the teacher find stories about frogs. A few include Frog and Toad are Friends by Arnold Lobel, The Toad Hunt by Janet Chenery, A Boy, a Dog and a Frog, by Mercer Mayer, A Toad for Tuesday, by Russell Erickson, and The Mysterious Tadpole, by Stephen Kellogg

Working together or individually, the children can make up their own frog stories, either dictating them or writing out a few sentences if they can. The stories can be illustrated and the children may want to make a class book with their stories. As the tadpoles develop, the children can observe what is happening to them and at least once a week the teacher can record their observations. The children will also have fun imitating frogs, jumping about and making frog noises. It would help them to make a frog noise if they could hear recordings of several frogs. The unit can be expanded however the teacher wishes, using the interests and abilities of the children to guide the activities. This unit can be extended at home in several ways. Activities could be asking the parent(s) to go to a library with the child and pick out stories about frogs to read together, and asking the parent(s) to take the child outside in the evening to listen to night sounds which might include frogs, crickets, cars, and buses.

Curriculum and Instruction: Issues

A major concern about curriculum and instruction for young children is the discontinuity that exists between preschool and kindergarten programs and between kindergarten and first grade programs. The problem of having different educational programs can be eliminated by the development of an articulated, developmentally appropriate curriculum for preschool and kindergarten programs. The problem of discontinuity between kindergarten and first grade programs is a bit more complicated.

The extent to which the academic program of the elementary grades has been pushed down into some kindergarten (and even into some preschool) programs is a critical concern to educators of young children. The reason for this concern is the inappropriateness of the typical elementary curricula and instruction for five- and six-year-old children.

During the hearings and in testimony, the School Readiness Task Force heard described kindergarten and first grade classrooms in which the children were required to sit passively for long periods of time while working on ditto sheets or in workbooks, or just listening or trying to learn by rote memorization--instructional strategies which not only are inappropriate to the children, but also are certain to convince many of them that they cannot be successful in school.

The following contrast between appropriate instruction for young children and the inappropriate instruction of some elementary classrooms illustrates the concern. The elementary classroom instruction that follows is not in harmony with the ways in which young children learn; hence the likelihood of a five-or six-year-old child experiencing success in such a learning setting is minimized.

Appropriate instruction	Inappropriate instruction
o Instruction is informal, interactive, and individualized; formal instruction is limited.	o Instruction is formal, whole group-oriented, and didactic.
o Child talk prevails.	o Teacher talk prevails.
o Children are free to choose activities.	o Children have little freedom to choose activity; they usually are doing teacher-delivered, whole-class activities.
o Teachers act as facilitators of children's learning.	o Teacher delivers education to students.
o Schedule is fluid, geared to each child's capacity and attention span.	o Schedule seldom varies, seems rigid.
o Classes are smaller; there is a teacher/child ratio of 1 to 24.	o Classes are larger; there is a teacher/child ratio of 1 to 28.
o Teaching and learning philosophy generally is based in the belief that the child constructs knowledge by interaction with the physical and social environment.	o Teaching and learning philosophy is based in the belief that knowledge exists outside the child and that it is acquired piece by piece through the mastery of the sequence of subskills that make up the totality of knowledge.
o Assessment/evaluation is informal; the purpose is to tailor the program to individual students.	o Formal assessment/evaluation are used; the purpose is to track students into specific programs.
o Program content values social, emotional, and physical as well as cognitive development.	o Program content focuses on basic cognitive skills, emphasizing the manipulation of symbols and the mastery of facts.
o Parents are actively involved in the education of their children.	o Parents are rarely or only superficially involved.

Readiness and Retention

Two major issues to be faced by each school district in the redesign of the curricular and instructional program of their young children are the twin issues of readiness and retention. Over the years, the concept of readiness has been used to indicate a student's being prepared to do the work at the next level of schooling, be it kindergarten, fourth grade, middle school, or high school. The purpose was to prevent placing children in learning situations in which they would fail.

In recent years, however, as programs for young children have become increasingly academic and less appropriate developmentally, either retention or delayed entry to kindergarten frequently has been used as a screen to exclude children from school rather than to ensure success. The decision that a child is not "ready" for kindergarten too often means that his or her parents are advised to wait another year before entering the child in kindergarten. Or the child is placed in a "junior" kindergarten class and will spend two years in a kindergarten curriculum that may or may not prepare him or her for first grade. The ultimate decision belongs to the parents. The role of the school is to advise the parents on both the positive and negative aspects of the situation. It is the position of the Department of Education that each child is entitled to a public education when he or she becomes the legal age for enrollment.

The concept of readiness also is being used inappropriately to justify retention. The kindergarten child judged not "ready" for first grade work is retained in kindergarten for another year. The impact of that retention on both the child's achievement and adjustment is often negative.[7] Research on school readiness and kindergarten retention has shown that:

> By the time they complete first grade, children who have repeated kindergarten do not out-perform comparison students: they do, however, have slightly more negative feelings about school. There is no achievement benefit in retaining a child in kindergarten or first grade and, regardless of how well the extra year is presented to the child, the child still pays an emotional cost.[8]

In light of these research findings, it seems essential that the concept of readiness be redefined. Instead of thinking of the "readiness" of the child to do the work of kindergarten or the first grade, the staff should think of the "readiness" of the school program to receive the children. To what extent are curriculum and instruction in kindergarten and in first grade designed to be appropriate to the developmental level, age, and individual needs and differences of each entering child? When curriculum and instruction are appropriate to the

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[7]Smith, Mary Lee and Lorrie A. Shepard. "What Doesn't Work: Explaining Policies of Retention in the Early Grades." Phi Delta Kappan, October 1987, pp. 129-134.

[8]Shepard, Lorrie A. and Mary Lee Smith. "Synthesis of Research on School Readiness and Kindergarten Retention." Educational Leadership, November 1986, p. 80.

children, the issue of retention fades away. The Department of Education urges schools to examine their retention policies for young children. One alternative to retention or to keep children out of school until they are "ready" is to change the program to fit the needs of the child rather than placing the child in an inappropriate program.

Assessment

The major issues in the assessment of young children are whether the assessment measures what is being taught and are assessment procedures being used appropriately, not whether or not there should be assessment. Each teacher must continually assess each child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in order to plan and present appropriate learning activities for that child. The most effective tool for making that ongoing assessment is teacher observation augmented by parent observation and samples of the child's involvement in instructional activities taken over time. For example, the teacher may want to keep samples of the children's dictation. In the unit on tadpoles mentioned previously, the beginning dictation may be only thoughts and feelings about the stories without being put in particular order. As the unit progresses, the children's dictation should begin to reflect more complete sentences and by the end of the unit, depending on the age and child, the dictation should be a story. Throughout the unit, the teacher can assess where the children need help with oral and written language and work with them individually or in small groups.

Other examples of assessment, in addition to samples of the children's work, include using video tapes and audio tapes to record the children's progress; keeping daily logs and/or having the children keep a journal, depending on their age; and informal observations documented with a brief narrative about what is taking place.

There are major concerns about assessment procedures being used currently that center on the increasing dependence on and misuse of norm-referenced, standardized tests, particularly with kindergarten-age children. This past decade has seen a tremendous increase in the use of formal testing with young children. In part, standardized, norm-referenced testing has accompanied the increase in academic kindergarten programs. With the pushing down of the first grade curriculum, instruction and learning have narrowed the kindergarten curriculum into more defined content and discrete skills which have invited more testing.

An increase in testing has also occurred because of the prevailing practice of testing children to determine entry into school and placement or retention in grade, such as a two-year developmental kindergarten or prefirst grade. Readiness and achievement tests that are not reliable, valid, or designed for this purpose are being used to classify, retain, and promote children rather than for their intended purpose of determining a child's relative preparation for a program.[9]

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[9]Meisels, Samuel J. "High Stakes Testing in Kindergarten." Educational Leadership, April 1989, pp. 16-22.

For special education assessment purposes, the California Education Code requires that eligibility be based on more than one assessment. For this age group, there is an emphasis on developmentally appropriate assessment measures, including observational assessments of the child in his or her natural environment with parent involvement. There is a requirement that all assessments be done in the child's primary language with culturally relevant testing materials. This becomes particularly relevant since the recent court directive to reduce the disproportionately high number of Hispanic students in special education classes in certain districts. A second court ruling prohibits the use of IQ tests with black students for any purpose related to special education, and many districts have generalized this rule to cover all students. Many districts are using criterion-referenced tests based on the classroom curriculum. But for the early primary student, a careful documentation using developmentally appropriate measures and observational data maintained by appropriately qualified individuals provides the most effective indication of potential success or failure in the learning environment.

Standardized testing is particularly inappropriate for young children because each child comes from a unique set of family experiences. What one family makes available for its children, another family does not. Some families travel extensively; some families seldom travel outside their community; some children attend preschool and/or day care; others remain at home under the care of a family member or other caregiver. And maturational factors are still very uneven at this age. Therefore, a standardized or norm-referenced test will not give an accurate picture of the individual child. Only as the children begin to have exposure to the same learning opportunities, materials, stories, and instructional environment(s) can an assessment of a child's relative ability to learn begin to be relevant.

In addition to these prevalent practices, there seems to be some confusion among educators and administrators as to what testing is required. The State Department of Education does not require standardized, norm-referenced testing of young children. In fact, it recommends that standardized, norm-referenced tests not be used in kindergarten. The Department does not condone the use of any standardized or "readiness" test that leads to or results in the tracking of children. Also, for the identification of Chapter 1 eligible students and the monitoring of their progress, the Department recommends the use of a variety of measures, including teacher observation of mastery of preacademic and academic skills, portfolios of children's drawings and experience stories, and parent input.[10]

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[10] Improving Educational Opportunity for Disadvantaged Students: An Advisory of Programmatic Ideas Derived from the Reauthorization of Chapter 1. The California State Department of Education Program Advisory, October 21, 1988.

Decisions about student retention should be based on multiple sources of information and never on the basis of a single test. Parents should be actively consulted in the assessment process. In addition, children whose primary language is other than English should be given an English language proficiency test for purposes of placement and instruction. Certainly the most effective and efficient means of monitoring student learning and designing appropriate instruction is through documented teacher observation and a close link between school and home to assure expectations and support are available to the child. In addition to teacher observation, anecdotal records, portfolios of the young child's instructional activities, including pictures and photographs, audiotapes of the children talking, and videotapes of the children actively engaged in learning all help the teacher assess the children's progress. Finally, criterion-referenced assessments which reflect what is being taught can be used to measure student learning.

Part II. Building Partnerships

Partnerships with Parents

Research over the past few years has shown that when parents are involved in their children's education, the children do better in school and the schools improve. The significant ideas emerging from this research are:

- The family, not the school, provides the primary educational environment.
- Involving parents in their children's formal education improves student achievement.
- Parent involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, long lasting, and well planned.
- The benefits are not confined to early childhood or elementary education; strong effects result from involving parents continuously throughout high school.
- Involving parents in their own children's education at home is not enough. To ensure the quality of schools as institutions serving the community, parents must be involved at all levels in the school.
- Children from low-income and minority families have the most to gain when schools involve parents.
- We cannot view the school and the home as isolated from one another: we must see how they interconnect with each other and with the world.[11]

In January of 1989, the California State Board of Education adopted the Parent Involvement Initiative, which states in part:

> The California State Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by school and family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the mission of California schools to educate all students effectively, schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.

Parent participation has always been a feature of preschool programs and traditionally, most kindergarten classes have had strong parent involvement. In addition, elementary schools throughout California have had formal parent involvement programs since the early seventies, first under the Early Childhood Education Program, then the School Improvement Program, the Bilingual Education Program, and the Special Education Program. What seems significant about the State Board policy is that it speaks to partnership, not just involvement or participation.

The concept of parents as partners recognizes that parents are, and should be, the most significant and influential adults in their children's lives and that parents are their children's primary teachers. When children enter school, they bring with them the attitudes, values, and behaviors of their families. These family attributes are the framework through which the children's school experiences are interpreted; and the greater the continuity between the values,

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[11]Henderson, Anne. The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement. National Committee for Citizens in Education, Columbia, Maryland, 1987.

attitudes, and behaviors of the home and those of the school, the greater will be the effect on the child's social, psychological, emotional, moral, linguistic, and cognitive development. Sustained, positive interaction between parents and school staff can ensure the continuity of attitudes and values that promote student success.

There are three basic types of parent involvement: school-based, in which the parents are involved in activities at the school or in support of the school program; home-based, in which parents help their children at home; and community-based, in which the school, family, and community are all involved in issues about school and schooling. Some typical home-based activities include reading aloud to children on a regular basis; encouraging the children to count out things such as utensils, napkins, glasses, and so forth for the table; discussing billboards and signs that the children can read; playing catch; letting children practice measuring and pouring water from one container to another; and providing material for children to draw, color, cut, and paint at home. Typical school-based activities usually consist of having the parents assist in a child's classroom including taking dictation from students; playing games with them; going on field trips with the students; listening to them read or reading aloud to them; helping with projects involving science, art, mathematics, or any other subject area; and by talking to the class about a variety of topics such as celebrations of special days at home. Volunteer parents can become a resource to teachers if the teacher makes use of their experience and special interests to assist with classroom instruction. For example, parents who are computer programmers, artists, cooks, and athletes can all add to the regular classroom instruction. Community members should also be invited to participate including mail persons, fire persons, police persons, and others. Appropriate training opportunities and family involvement activities should be provided for the parents in instructional and support roles.

For effective partnerships between parents and school, all three types of involvement are desirable, although the mix of activities depends upon the specific situation at each school. For example, in their studies on parent involvement, McLaughlin and Shields[12] found that school-based parent participation programs in which parents are involved on the school's terms work for economically advantaged parents and those in the mainstream. For low-income parents, however, home-based parent partnership programs are more effective. These programs not only yield clear academic gains for the children, they also increase levels of parent interest and support for the school, and the children's teachers also gain from greater knowledge of their students' home environment. Early education programs should reflect the strong family focus of the young child's world in the parent involvement activities and programs offered.

Given the various conditions of today's families, it is important that schools at all levels expand their concept of parent involvement into the concept of partnership adopted by the State Board.

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[12]McLaughlin, Milbrey Wallin, and Patrick M. Shields. "Involving Low-Income Parents in the Schools: A Role for Policy?" Phi Delta Kappan, October 1987, pp. 156-160.

The State Board Policy Comprehensive Parent Involvement Program

1. Help parents develop parenting skills and foster conditions at home that support their children's efforts in learning.
2. Provide parents with the knowledge of techniques designed to assist their children in learning at home.
3. Provide access to and coordinate community support services for children and families.
4. Promote clear two-way communication between school and family about school programs and children's progress.
5. Involve parents, with appropriate training, in instructional and support roles at school.
6. Support parents as decision makers and develop their leadership in governance, advisory, and advocacy roles.[13]

Partnerships Among the Schools and Program of Four-, Five-, and Six-Year-Old Children

The concept of partnership includes the relationship between public and private preschool programs, kindergarten, and first grade within the context of continuity of children's schooling. Each school district should examine the barriers that impede or prevent continuity of schooling as children progress from preschool to kindergarten. Articulation should be established among the receiving kindergarten and the public and/or private preschool programs, children's centers, and other programs that serve four-year-old children. At the same time, districts should remove any barriers that inhibit or prevent communication and coordination between kindergarten and first grade teachers and programs.

Once the kindergarten, preschool programs and first grade staff are all talking to each other on a regular basis, they should begin to define and align the curriculum so that the children can experience a continuity of developmentally appropriate learning activities as they progress through preschool and the early primary years.

The challenge facing all teachers of young children is to provide an experiential learning environment in which children of all abilities can progress through their early years of schooling, regardless of their highly varied backgrounds, interests, and aptitudes. In order to meet this challenge the teachers should first establish a common, research-based teaching philosophy or set of premises about how young children learn. Once the teaching philosophy is adopted, the next step is for district administrators, including representatives of all categorical programs, and child development directors to provide the support each teacher needs to implement a program reflective of the stated philosophy.

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[13]Parent Involvement Initiative: A Policy and Plan of Action. 1988, California State Department of Education.

Staff Development

Staff development activities designed to support each teacher as he or she seeks to develop or refine the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure the success at school of each child should be:

- Consistent with the vision outlines in site, district, county, and state goals and objectives.
- Available when and where the teachers need them.
- Designed to meet the specific needs of the participants.
- Offered in a variety of learning opportunities, in a variety of settings, including other teachers' classrooms, and at times when the teachers can gain the most from these opportunities.
- Designed to promote the professionalism of teaching and collegiality among the teaching staff.
- Viewed as an integral part of a teacher's job rather than a pull-out or add-on program.
- Offered to all adults who work with the children.
- Supported by a variety of resources, including mentor teachers, fellow teachers and administrators, resource teachers, and community resources.

Staff development should include topics such as:

- Child growth and development.
- The design and implementation of developmentally appropriate curricula, instruction, and materials.
- Techniques for dealing with the special needs of handicapped children.
- Philosophy and strategies for developing active parent and family involvement programs.
- The systematic observation of children.
- Appropriate assessment strategies and how to interpret and apply assessment results.
- Language development and the role of the primary language and second language acquisition.
- The cultures of the families being served and the community in which the school is located.
- Teamwork strategies and techniques so that the teachers at each site are able to work together to present an integrated curriculum.
- Strategies and techniques to facilitate the successful transition of children between and among programs.

District-level and school administrative support for staff development is critical. Principals and administrators at both the school- and district-level should validate the importance of staff development by providing the necessary time, money, and other resources and by exploring ways to maximize the impact of available funds for staff development. It is also important for administrators to be knowledgeable about sound educational policies and practices for young children so as to support staff members as they design and implement curricula and instruction. County offices of education and special education local plan areas (SELPAs) provide many activities through their curriculum development and staff training support functions.

Educational Program and Partnership Summary:

The State Department of Education's position on the major issues discussed in this advisory is summarized in the following statements:

- An alternative to retention or keeping children out of school until they are "ready" is to change programs to fit the needs of the child rather than placing the child in an inappropriate program.
- Every child is entitled to enter public school when he or she reaches the legal age for enrollment.
- The Department of Education does not support the placement of children in two-year kindergartens, pre- or junior first grade programs, delayed entry into first grade, or any other configuration which might result in the tracking of children.
- Norm-referenced, standardized tests should not be used as the only assessment with young children.
- Parents should be included as partners in their children's schooling.
- Staff development in child growth and development, developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction, and in assessment strategies is important for teachers and administrators in programs for young children.

Part III. Implementing the Recommendations of the School Readiness Task Force Report

The purpose of this section is to provide procedural suggestions and ideas to those who will be implementing the recommendations of the task force report. The underlying concept is to involve all concerned teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members in: (a) the definition of an optimal program for four-, five-, and six-year-old children in light of the task force recommendations; (b) a review of programs currently being provided; and (c) a redesign of the programs as necessary to align them with the vision of an optimal program. These procedural suggestions follow from the discussion topics of the preceding pages, providing implementation ideas.

In addition to the School Readiness Task Force Report, resources for use in defining programs of quality for young children should include the knowledge and capabilities of the teachers of young children in the preschool and early primary programs within the district as well as the experts in child growth and development at nearby colleges and universities. The appendix of this Program Advisory contains two lists of printed resources: a selected reading list and a list of pertinent publications available from the State Department of Education.

Defining the Educational Program

Creating the Vision

1. Establish a committee for the education of children ages four through six.

   Members of this committee should include interested teachers and parents of children in preschool (public and private), Head Start, child development programs, kindergarten through third grades, program directors, including representatives of all categorical programs, principals, district office staff members, governing board members, children's librarians, representatives of community service agencies and caregivers for families, and other resource people such as nurses, physicians, social workers, professors of early childhood education and early childhood special education, and child psychologists. Care should be taken to ensure that parent members of the committee are representative of the socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic population of the community and that the committee as a whole represents all segments concerned about the education of young children in both the community and the educational system. Each community should make an effort to identify any existing committees or task forces addressing this age group to assure effective interfacing for common purposes and goals.

   This committee should be considered the main committee from which other subcommittees will be formed and to which they will report.

2. Define the vision of quality education for four-, five-, and six-year-old children.

   For successful implementation of a redesigned educational program, it is important that all who will implement the program have a voice in its creation. Therefore, the committee should arrange through a series of interviews, hearings, area meetings, staff and parent discussions, testimony from experts, and the like to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to help form that vision.

For this definition, the vision statement should be more like a philosophical statement or set of beliefs than a plan for action; it should be fairly general in nature, providing overall direction rather than addressing specific details.

3. Disseminate draft of vision throughout district to primary and preschool program administrators (public and private), staff members, parents, and concerned community members, then revise based on input.

   This step may require several drafts. The draft is completed when there is sufficient agreement to submit the vision to the governing board.

4. Submit to the governing board of the school district for adoption and disseminate to all parents, teachers, administrators, and others concerned about the redesign of educational programs for young children.

Curriculum and Instruction

1. Establish a subcommittee of teachers, principals, directors of preschool programs, and district administrators representative of all early childhood programs, including special educators, to examine the preschool through early primary curriculum.

   Teachers from both public and private preschool programs, kindergarten classes, and primary grades should be the majority members of this subcommittee. The task of the subcommittee is to determine what is currently being taught and how it is taught and then to agree upon what should be taught and how at each level. It is important that subcommittee members talk to curriculum specialists in key areas and that they review relevant research and practices, including this program advisory, state curriculum frameworks, and model curriculum guides. All teachers of young children, as well as parents, should have the opportunity to meet with the subcommittee and share their thoughts and concerns about what the children are or are not learning. The district may want to put this review on the same cycle for each subject area as the state framework and textbook adoption cycle described more fully in the program advisory on curriculum review, improvement, and implementation (CIL: 87/8-9, Nov. 23, 1987).

   The review should include an analysis of:

   - The curriculum areas included.
   - The learning strands covered in each curriculum area.
   - What is missing from the curriculum at each level.
   - How the curriculum and instruction allow for accommodation to the diversity of needs and abilities of the children in a heterogeneous grouping.
   - How children are being taught in each curriculum area at each level.
   - How appropriate to the children's age and individual needs and differences curriculum and instruction are at each level.
   - The nature and extent of curriculum integration at each level.
   - The extent to which the curriculum reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the children and their families.

   The recommended curriculum guide that the subcommittee develops should be general in nature, addressing the major learnings that children should achieve at each level rather than the specific learning activities. With

a more general guide, each teacher can develop learning activities that are appropriate to his or her group of children. The guide should include strategies for adapting to special needs children if appropriate.

2. The subcommittee recommends the curriculum guide to the district governing board for adoption.

3. Staff development is provided for all teachers who will implement the revised curriculum.

   Consider using the skills and knowledge of the teachers as staff development resources. The cross observation of programs and the sharing of effective teaching strategies can be of great benefit to teachers dedicated to expanding their teaching skills. Consider also use of the resources of compensatory education, special education, bilingual education, and the school improvement program for staff development activities and include preschool teachers along with kindergarten and early primary teachers.

   In order to ensure the connectedness between the curriculum and instructional program and the concepts, values, linguistic abilities, and expectations that the children bring to school, staff development in the cultures and languages of their children is important for all teachers.

4. Provide parents with orientation training and copies of the curriculum so they become familiar with what their children will be learning and doing in school and why.

Readiness and Retention

1. Define "readiness" as part of the vision of quality education for young children.

   Consider first affirming the belief that all children can succeed in school as the cornerstone of the vision; then defining readiness to mean the readiness of the curriculum, instructional materials and methodology, the classroom environment, the teachers and other adults at the school, and the supportive services to receive the children.

2. Obtain from teachers, parents, and administrators agreement with the definition of readiness.

   Recognize the difficulty of changing the way people think or are accustomed to doing business and utilize available resources to help each teacher and administrator recognize that it makes educational sense to adapt the program to the needs of the children rather than to try to fit the child to the program or exclude him or her altogether.

3. Examine retention policies and practices. Modify as appropriate, obtain governing board approval, and disseminate.

   Review current research on the effects of retention on young children and use as a base for discussions with teachers, parents, and policymakers.

4. Establish alternative practices to retention.

   Consider the following alternatives:

   - o Adopt flexible standards of competence in the primary grades.
   - o Delay testing for the purposes of accountability.
   - o Provide flexible class arrangements that decrease grade isolation.
   - o Offer a variety of curricula and use instructional practices that take into consideration natural variations in achievement, ability, linguistic competence, and background.
   - o Provide services that enhance the opportunity to learn and prevent failure, such as tutoring, summer school, learning laboratories, guidance services, parent education, and individualized instruction.
   - o Provide multi-age grouping opportunities.
   - o Include parents in planning and implementing learning activities to maximize success of the child.

Assessment

1. Review current assessment policies and practices.

   If the district has mandated a policy of standardized testing in kindergarten, the first step should be to convince the policymakers that such testing by itself is not in the best interest of the children. Other methods of assessment such as teacher observation would provide more accurate information for teachers and the instructional program as well as for children.

2. Establish the purpose or purposes of assessment.

   Two major purposes of assessment of young children are: to assess what children have learned and the skills they have acquired so teachers can plan instruction accordingly; and to identify children with potential or actual special needs. Once the purpose of assessment is established, the most appropriate procedures for conducting the assessment can be selected.

3. Provide in-service for teachers on appropriate assessment of young children, how to carry out the assessment, and how to interpret the results for instructional program planning.

4. Inform parents about the assessment procedures being used and their impact on their child's progress in school.

Building Partnerships

Parent Partnerships

1. Establish a districtwide Parent Partnership Subcommittee to advise the district on parent participation policies and strategies and to establish liaison with community service and support agencies.

Subcommittee members should represent parents, teachers, and administrators of children in public and private preschool programs and the early primary grades of the elementary schools. In addition, parent members should be representative of all segments of the parent population--working parents, single parents, minority parents, parents whose primary language is other than English, parents of varying income levels, parents of children with exceptional needs, and parents who are recent immigrants. The major tasks of the subcommittee are (1) to help develop parent education and involvement policies; (2) to serve as a conduit for schools in identifying available community resources and obtaining the needed services; and (3) to act as communitywide advocates for children, their families, and their schools.

2. At each school and preschool program, use the School Site Council or the Parent Advisory Subcommittee as a vehicle for involving parents in decision making about school and district policies and strategies that impact them and their children; include representation from feeder preschool programs.

   Each school and preschool program should establish why parent involvement is important and articulate that belief to all parents and the staff of the school. The school principal or preschool director establishes a school climate that can both welcome and respect parents. The administrator/director should ensure that the school staff reaches out to establish partnership with all parents.

3. Identify at the district level an individual to serve as a parent involvement, parent education resource for the schools and to the district Parent Partnership Subcommittee and to act as a liaison between the public schools and the preschool programs, including special education programs.

   The primary responsibility for this individual would be to identify a bank of resources for schools to use in building parent partnerships. This bank would include a variety of parent involvement strategies which have been proved to be successful in other, similar schools, such as samples of printed materials in various languages, names of translators and leaders of the people of immigrant communities, materials for parent education, names of people to conduct parent education sessions, techniques and strategies for working on committees, and so forth.

<u>Partnership Among Programs</u>

1. Establish procedures for ongoing evaluation of curricular changes, including the field testing of new curricular ideas and materials.

2. Identify an individual to coordinate staff development activities for teachers and administrators of programs for four-, five-, and six-year-old children.

3. Build partnerships with local businesses and other community agencies that can provide direct support to the schools and programs serving young children four through six years.

APPENDIX A
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four branches of the Department of Education--Field Services, Specialized Programs, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Program Assistance and Compliance--worked together to create this advisory. The group hopes that these recommendations and suggestions will help schools and programs at the local level establish an institutional voice parallel to what they have established at the state level as advocates for the right of every child to a successful school experience. Members included:

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Susan Thompson, Administrator, Child Development Division
Kay Witcher, Administrator, Child Development Division
Jeff Zettel, Consultant, Instructional Support Services Division

Appendix B

SELECTED READING LIST

Bredekamp, Sue and Lorrie Shepard. "How Best to Protect Children from Inappropriate School Expectations, Practices, and Policies." Young Children, March 1989, pp. 14-24.

Bredekamp, Sue, Ed. Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8: Expanded Edition. National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC, 1988.

California 2000: A People in Transition, Major Issues Affecting Human Resources. Assembly Office of Research, Sacramento, 1987.

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Haycock, Kati and Susana M. Navarro. Unfinished Business: Fulfilling Our Children's Promise, A Report from the Achievement Council. Oakland, California, May 1988.

Katz, Lillian G. and others. A Place Called Kindergarten. Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois, 1987.

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Right from the Start. Report of the National Association of School Boards of Education Task Force on Early Childhood Education, Alexandria, Virginia, 1988.

Scott-Jones, Diane. "Families as Educators: The Transition from Informal to Formal School Learning." Educational Horizons, Winter 1988 (Note: This entire issue is on parent involvement.)

Shepard, Lorrie A. "Why We Need Better Assessments." Educational Leadership, April 1989 (Note: This entire issue is on assessment.)

Smith, Mary Lee and Lorrie A. Shepard. "What Doesn't Work: Explaining Policies of Retention in the Early Grades." Phi Delta Kappan, October 1987, pp. 129-134.

Special Education and the Limited-English-Proficient Student: A Guide to Assessment, Identification and Educational Planning for the LEP Student. Merced County/District Special Education Local Plan Area, Office of the Merced County Superintendent of Schools, July 1986.

Dear Educator:

The Department of Education has available curriculum guides and frameworks to assist schools with planning. The items listed below include information on kindergarten and may be ordered from Publications Sales, State Department of Education, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95802-0271. California residents please add sales tax to the listed order price.

ISBN	TITLE	PRICE
	Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985)	$4.50
0-8011-0760-1	Celebrating the National Reading Initiative (1989)	6.75
0-8011-0763-6	Center-based Preschool-Age Program Quality Review Instrument (1988)	2.00
0-8011-0041-0	English-Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools (1987)	3.00
0-8011-0731-X	English-Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, K-12 (1988)	3.00
0-8011-0764-4	Family Child Care Program Quality Review Instrument (1988)	2.00
0-8011-0804-7	Foreign Language Framework for California Public Schools (1989)	5.50
0-8011-0250-2	Handbook on California Education for Language Minority Parents--Chinese/English (1985) [Also available in: Armenian/English, Cambodian/ English, Hmong/English, Korean/English, Japanese/ English, Laotian/English, Pilipino/English, Spanish/English, Vietnamese/English @ $3.25 each]	3.25
0-8011-0167-0	Handicapped Infant and Preschool Children: Program Guidelines (1981)	2.50
0-8011-0737-7	Here They Come: Ready or Not-Report of the School Readiness Task Force (Summary) (1988)	2.00
0-8011-0734-2	Here They Come: Ready or Not-Report of the School Readiness Task Force (Full Report) (1988)	4.25
0-8011-0735-0	Here They Come Ready or Not-Appendixes to the Full Report of the School Readiness Task Force (1988)	16.50
0-8011-0712-1	History--Social Science Framework for California Public Schools (1988)	6.00
0-8011-0358-4	Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools (1985)	3.00
0-8011-0664-8	Mathematics Model Curriculum Guide, K-8 (1987)	2.75
0-8011-0667-2	Parent Involvement Programs in California (1987)	3.50
0-8011-0231-6	Parents Are Teachers, Too (brochure) (1984)	NC
0-8011-0306-1	Physical Education for Individuals with Exceptional Needs (1986)	9.75
0-8011-0311-8	Recommended Readings in Literature, K-8 (1986)	2.25
0-8011-0745-8	Recommended Readings in Literature, K-8 Annotated Edition (1988)	4.50
0-8011-0354-1	Science Framework Addendum (1984)	3.00
0-8011-0665-6	Science Model Curriculum Guide, K-8 (1987)	3.25
0-8011-0805-5	Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools (1989)	6.00